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## **Sikkema: Urban Causes of Sprawl, Over Development Need Attention**

*Quality Schools, Safe Neighborhoods, Good Jobs and Affordable  
Housing Key To Protecting Michigan's Open Spaces*

LANSING – Stemming sprawl and over development of Michigan's open spaces will occur only if a bipartisan commission examining land use issues considers the plight of the state's urban centers, Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema said today at the first meeting of the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council.

"Any land use recommendations and proposals to come from this council must take a hard and in-depth look at the reasons why people chose to move out of our urban areas," Sikkema said. "We must examine why urban areas are less attractive to more and more people and we must find ways to make our cities desirable places to live, raise a family and grow a business."

Sikkema, R-Wyoming, cited four areas – quality schools, safe neighborhoods, good jobs and affordable housing – that will assist in making urban areas attractive places to live and work. He said Michigan has put forward many proposals and programs that have helped improve the inner cities and urban areas, but he cautioned council members that more work is needed if they truly want to address land use issues across the state.

"Land use is not just a rural, or out-state issue; it is something that affects all of Michigan from the shores of Saugatuck to the streets of Detroit," Sikkema said. "To treat land use as a rural issue would be a mistake and a missed opportunity. It would be like treating the symptoms of growth and sprawl, but not their cause."

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Today's meeting of the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council was the first meeting since Sikkema, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm and House Speaker Rick Johnson, R-LeRoy, announced the formation of the bipartisan commission.

Chaired by former Governor William Milliken and former Attorney General Frank Kelly, the council is comprised of members representing various environmental, business, labor and government groups who are charged with examining Michigan's existing land use laws and exploring new policies and programs. The governor and the Legislature have an equal number of appointees on the council.

Sikkema, one of the Legislature's leading environmental proponents, said Michigan already has numerous laws that deal with land use issues. Some of those initiatives include: the Critical Dunes Act; the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act; the Clean Michigan Initiative; and other laws to limit growth.

"All of these initiatives were and are good ideas," Sikkema said. "But absent of ideas and recommendations to deal with the root causes of urban sprawl, they are like one lung laboring to give breath to a comprehensive land-use philosophy that will benefit all of Michigan."